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United States Diplomatic Note to Spain *Legation of the United States, San Sebastian, Spain, September 23, 1897*

YOUR EXCELLENCY: On Saturday, September 18 instant, you did me the honor to receive me in our first official interview after my presentation to Her Majesty the Queen on Monday, September 13. Upon your very courteous intimation that you would be pleased to listen to whatever communication I might have for the Spanish Government, I replied to your excellency that the relations between your Government and mine were such that true friendship required us to speak to each other with entire frankness. I beg to reiterate the purposes of friendship and good will with which that interview began. The President most earnestly desires peace and friendship between Spain and the United States. I can not impress this fact upon your thought too strongly. If in anything I may write in this communication or hereafter I shall seem earnest and positive, it is only because I believe that we shall most certainly maintain and strengthen the ancient peace and friendship between our two Governments if there shall be no possible misunderstanding by Spain of what the United States desires and seeks. Therefore and at the beginning of our negotiations I wish to impress upon your excellency this primary and essential fact: The United States wish peace and friendship with Spain.

After I had read to your excellency certain parts of instructions which I had received from my Government before departing from Washington to come to my post, you did me the honor to ask me if I would furnish you with a copy of so much of the dispatch as I had read, or, should I not feel at liberty to do this, if I would address you in writing stating the substance of what I had read and communicating to the Spanish Government the desires and wishes of the United States. I had the honor to reply to you that I would address you in writing on Thursday, the 23rd of September, and your excellency very courteously assured me that such communication would be laid before the council of ministers as soon as the same could be conveniently done after the return of her Majesty's court to Madrid. It thus becomes my duty, under the instructions of my Government and pursuant to your very considerate suggestion, to invite the attention of the Spanish Government to the following statements:

During thirteen years of the past twenty-nine years the island of Cuba has been unfortunately the scene of grave disorder and sanguinary conflict. On two distinct occasions the power and authority of the Spanish Crown have been arrayed against a serious and persistent effort of a large proportion of the population of the island to achieve independence. The insurrection which began at Yara in October, 1868, lasted for ten years, and ended not so much because of the physical repression of the revolt by force of arms as by reason of the exhaustion of the combatants and the conclusion of a truce based upon the concession by the Spanish Government to the Cubans of certain measures of autonomous reform in 1877 and 1878. The peace thus brought about proved unstable, and, after some sixteen years of more or less unsatisfactory continuance, was broken by a renewed manifestation of the deeply rooted aspirations of the native Cuban elements toward more complete enjoyment of local self-government. Beginning in February, 1895, in an uprising which, like the previous insurrection of Yara, was local and unorganized, the movement spread rapidly until, on the 27th of that month, the superior authority of the island deemed it necessary to issue a proclamation declaring the rich and populous districts about Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba in a "state of siege."

Thereafter, notwithstanding the extensive military operations under-taken to crush the revolt, and despite the unprecedented exertions put forth by Spain and the armies and treasure poured into the disturbed territory, the conflict extended over the greater part of the island and invaded the western provinces, which the insurrection of Yara had failed to arouse. For more than two years a wholly unexampled struggle has raged in Cuba between the discontented native population and the mother power. Not only has its attendant ruin spread over a larger area than in any previous contest, but its effects have been more widely felt and the cost of life and treasure has been far greater. The strife continues on a footing of mutual destruction and devastation. Day by day the conviction gathers strength that it is visionary for Spain to hope that Cuba, even if eventually subjugated by sheer exhaustion, can ever bear to Spain anything like the relations which she once bore. The policy which obviously attempts to make Cuba worthless to the Cubans, should they prevail must inevitably make the island equally worthless to Spain in the event of reconquest, whether Cuba be regained as a subject possession or endowed with a reasonable

measure of self administration.

The recuperative processes, always painfully slow in an exhausted community, would necessarily be doubly remote in either of the latter contingencies, for in the light of the events of the past twenty-nine years, capital and industry would shrink from again engaging in costly enterprises in a field where neither proximate return nor permanent security is to be expected. To fix the truth of this assertion one need only regard the fate of the extraordinary efforts to rehabilitate the fortunes of Cuba that followed the truce of 1878. The capital and intelligence contributed by citizens of the United States and other countries which at that time poured into Cuba, seeking to endow the island with the marvelous resources of modern invention and advanced industrial processes, have now become submerged in the common ruin. The commerce of Cuba has dwindled to such unprofitable proportions that its ability for self-support is questionable even if peace were restored today.

Weighing all these facts carefully and without prejudice, in the judgment of the President the time has come for the Government of the United States to soberly consider and clearly decide the nature and methods of its duty both to its neighbors and itself. It is ceaselessly confronted with questions affecting the inherent and treaty rights of its citizens in Cuba. It beholds the island suffering an almost complete paralysis of many of its most necessary commercial functions by reason of the impediments imposed and the ruinous injuries wrought by this internecine warfare at its very doors. And above all, it is naturally and rightfully apprehensive lest some untoward incident may abruptly supervene to inflame mutual passions beyond control, and thus raise issues which, however deplorable, it might not be possible to avoid.

In the true interest of peace and friendship the Government of the United States believes that a policy of mere inaction can not be safely prolonged.

The President of the United States considers it to be his serious and friendly duty to inform the Government of Spain that there is no longer question that the sentiment of the American people strongly demands that if the attitude of neutrality is to be maintained by the United States toward these combatants in Cuba, it must be a genuine neutrality as between combatants fully recognized as such in fact as well as in name. The problem of recognition of belligerency has been often presented to the decision of the Government of the United States, but never, perhaps, more explicitly than now. Both Houses of the American Congress, nearly a year ago, adopted by an almost unanimous vote a concurrent resolution recognizing belligerency in Cuba, and latterly the

Senate of the United States, by a large majority, has voted a joint resolution of like purport, which is now pending in the House of Representatives. The American Congress has now adjourned, but will meet again early in the approaching December.

At this juncture the President instructs me, in most courteous form and with most friendly purpose to inquire of the Spanish Government whether the time has not arrived when Spain, of her own volition, moved by her own interests and by every paramount sentiment of humanity, will put a stop to this destructive war and make proposals of settlement honorable to herself and just to her Cuban colony and to mankind.

The extraordinary, because direct and not merely theoretical or sentimental, interest of the United States in the Cuban situation can not be ignored. Not only are our citizens largely concerned in the ownership of property and in the industrial and commercial ventures which have been set on foot in Cuba through their enterprising initiative and sustained by their capital, but the chronic condition of trouble and violent derangement in that island constantly causes disturbance in the social and political condition of our own people. It keeps up continuous irritation within our borders, injuriously affects the normal functions of business, and tends to unsettle the condition of prosperity to which the United States is entitled.

No exception can be taken to the general proposition that a neighboring nation, however deeply disturbed and injured by the existence of a devastating internal conflict at its doors, may be constrained on grounds of international comity to disregard its endangered interests and remain a passive spectator of the contest for a reasonable time while the titular authority is repressing the disorder. The essence of this moral obligation lies in the reasonableness of the delay invited by circumstances and by the effort of the territorial authority to assert its claimed rights. The onlooking nation need only wait a "reasonable time" before alleging and acting upon the rights which it, too, possesses.

The question arises, then, whether Spain has not already had a reasonable time to restore peace and been unable to do so, even by tremendous concentration and expenditure of her resources and by the employment of measures of unusual severity. The methods which Spain has adopted to wage the fight give no prospect of immediate peace or of a stable return to the conditions of prosperity which are essential to Cuba in its intercourse with its neighbors. Spain's inability entails upon the United States a degree of injury and suffering which can not longer be ignored.

Assuredly Spain can not expect the Government of the United States to sit idle letting vast interests suffer, our political elements

be disturbed, and the country he perpetually embroiled, while no apparent progress is being made in the settlement of the Cuban problem. Such a policy of inaction by the United States would in reality prove of no benefit to Spain while certain to do the United States incalculable harm.

For all the reasons before stated, the President feels it his duty to make the strongest possible effort to help bring about results of peace and prosperity which shall be in conformity alike with the feelings of the American people, the inherent rights of civilized man, and be of advantage both to Cuba and to Spain.

It should be borne in mind from the start that it is far removed from the feelings of the American people and the mind of the President to propose or suggest any solution to which the slightest idea of humiliation to Spain could in any way be attached. The President most earnestly trusts that no possible intention or occasion to wound the just sensibilities of the Castilian nation can be discerned in the altogether friendly suggestion that the good offices of the United States may now be lent to the advantage of Spain.

In obedience to the instructions of my Government, I now bring these considerations to the attention of the Government of her Majesty the Queen Regent.

I sincerely trust that Her Majesty's Government will appreciate the constantly imperiled national interests of the United States, and will believe that it is only after the most patient waiting and with the sincerest friendliness that these suggestions are made.

I trust that Her Majesty's Government will also appreciate the self-restraint which the Government of the United States has hitherto observed until endurance has ceased to be possible for any longer indefinite term.

I trust that Her Majesty's Government will believe in the unselfish friendliness of the desires of the United States and in the high purpose and sincere wish of the United States to give its aid only in order that a peaceful and enduring result may be reached, just and honorable alike to Spain and to the Cuban people, and only so far as such aid may accomplish the wished for ends. I can not disguise the gravity of the situation nor conceal the conviction of the President that should his present effort be fruitless his duty to his countrymen will necessitate an early decision as to the course of action which the time and the transcendent emergency may demand.

As to the manner in which the assistance of the United States can be effectively rendered in the Cuban situation, the President

has no desire to embarrass the Government of Spain by formulating precise proposals. All that is asked or expected is that some safe way may be provided for action which the United States may undertake with justice and self-respect and that the settlement shall be a lasting one, honorable and advantageous to Spain and to Cuba and equitable to the United States.

For the accomplishment of this end, now and in the future, the Government of the United States hereby offers its most kindly offices.

Allow me to assure your Excellency that, in suggesting as early an answer to this tender of good offices as the gravity of the question may permit, nothing is further from the thought of the President or from the purpose of the Government of the United States than the possibility of embarrassing the Spanish Government.

But it is sincerely hoped that during the coming month of October the Government of Spain may either be able to formulate some proposal under which this tender of good offices may become effective or may give satisfactory assurances that peace in Cuba will, by the efforts of Spain, be promptly secured.

Permit me to close this note as I began, with the most sincere and respectful suggestion that peace in Cuba is necessary to the welfare of the people of the United States, and that the only desire of my Government is for peace and that sure prosperity which can only come with peace.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to your Excellency the assurance of my most distinguished consideration.

STEWART L. WOODFORD

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Vincent Ferraro Home Page at Mt. Holyoke College Source: U.S.

Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), pp. 568-573

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